

REMARKS

In the specification, the abstract has been corrected to comply with MPEP 608.01(b) wherein use of the term “means” objected to by the examiner has been replaced with appropriate language.

In the drawings, examiner has objected under 37 CFR 1.83a that drawings do not show the “seal” feature recited in claim 20. Applicant has withdrawn claim 20 without prejudice thereby obviating the drawing objection.

In the claims, claims 12, 13, 18, 19 and 21 have been amended. New claim 23 has been introduced. Claim 20 has been withdrawn without prejudice. No new matter has been added by way of these amendments. Applicants seek to place the claims in more suitable condition for US prosecution.

Claim 12 has been amended to recite that “*several add-on sectors assembled around the portion of the tube such that said sectors form a protective envelope surrounding the tube*” as described in paragraph [0019] and shown in the exploded diagram of Figure 2.

The examiner argues that the insert 88 of McLoughlin (US 6,668,935) anticipates this feature. However, a ‘sector’ is quite different from an ‘insert’, the difference being self-evident from the respective descriptions of the present application and McLoughlin generally. Specifically, the add-on sectors in the present application combine with each other to form a protective envelope surrounding said portion of production tubing. Paragraph [0019] of the present application describes for example that the so-formed protective envelope prevents any contact between the portion of the production tube and the fluid which causes wear by erosion.

In contrast, the insert 88 of McLoughlin does not form such a protective envelope. Indeed, the purpose of insert 88 is to provide localized protection for each individual orifice and does not combine to form a protective cover surrounding the production tubing.

This is not a trivial distinction. The geometric design of the add-on sector arrangement of the present application enables not only localized orifice protection but, additionally, offers improved protection for the rest of said portion of production tube (see paragraph [0006] and [0007]). Moreover, the protective envelope configuration of the add-on sectors also lends itself to an ease of assembly using a simple clamping arrangement for enabling different shaped orifices to be protected. Thus, the add-on sector arrangement is not an obvious design improvement, but instead bestows a plurality of advantages over the prior art.

New claim 23 is based on independent claim 12 as previously presently, but further recites the feature of “*...said protection system having a clamping arrangement for clamping said add-on sectors to the tube independent of a geometric shape of the through orifices of the tube*”, as described in paragraph [0015] of the specification. Specifically, it is described that the clamping arrangement of the present application overcomes any ‘force-fitting’ of the inner stiffeners into the through orifices. In particular, the shortcomings of force-fitted protection systems are known and require geometrically matched shapes (see paragraph [0010]). Examiner acknowledges that the insert 88 of McLoughlin does appear to be concerned with such a press fit into the orifice (see also col.6 lines 16-17 of McLoughlin teaching that the insert lines the orifice and/or may be a separate material deposited on the orifice surface).

Instead the clamping arrangement of the present application overcomes such shortcomings by enabling a large diversity on the choice of the geometric shapes of the openings (see paragraph [0041] of the present application). The examiner points to Oneal (US 6,491,097)

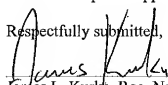
which is alleged to teach the fastening of sectors to tubing. However, it is the function of the clamping arrangement which allows for the clamping of protective sectors independent of the geometric shape of the tube orifices which is distinguished. Even if Oneal is combined with McLoughlin, the combination does not teach this claimed feature.

The Applicants believe the claims are in condition for allowance, early passage to issuance is requested. The Commissioner is authorized to charge any fee associated with the submission of this response to Deposit Account No. 50-2183 (Ref. No. 21.1056).

The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned patent attorney at 281-285-7114 with any questions, comments or suggestions relating to the referenced patent application.

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Respectfully submitted,


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